

AXIS OF RESISTANCE: A STUDY OF DESPAIR, MELANCHOLY, AND DIS- HEARTEDNESS IN SHAHNAZ BASHIR'S NOVEL *THE HALF MOTHER*

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ABSTRACT

The article depicts the current position of the people of Kashmir. It is the study of Shahnaz Bashir's novel The Half Mother. The novel satirizes the political and bureaucratic system, India's tyrannical role and the Military oppression in Kashmir. While the title of the paper itself signifies that it is dealing with the resistance literature. It can be said that numerous research fields might have valuable concepts, insights, and theories to contribute to resistance studies but this study for practical reasons maintains a focus on the resistance literature of India with special focus on the despair, melancholy, dis-heartedness, despondency, oppression, plight, struggle, brutality, and resistance movement of Kashmir. Kashmir is witnessing an intense pain and suffering from the last thirty years because of turmoil, uncertainty, confusion, chaos and conflict prevailing therein. This has left scars, wounds, and abrasions in the hearts of the victimized people of Kashmir. This unlawfulness, draconian laws, harsh treatment, killing, murder, and displacement gives rise to a mass movement, against the government, army and bureaucracy of India, which is called terrorism by Indian government and Jihad by some orthodox religious people, but actually it is neither Jihad nor terrorism, it is resistance against all the brutalities, harms, killings, displacements and disappearances.

KEYWORDS: Resistance, Murder, Displacement, Disappearance, Melancholy, Despair, Dis-heartedness

INTRODUCTION

Resistance is a small and recent field of studies in Social Science, Humanities and Literature, in which the term 'resistance' is explicitly examined, theorized and discussed as disguised resistance, civil resistance, critical resistance, resistance against oppression and power, etc. Within another overlapping field of studies, such as social movement studies, terrorism studies or subaltern studies, there exist also suggestions of other concepts with different but similar connotations, e.g. disagreement, protest, struggle, revolution, rallies or mass protest, etc. While recognizing that numerous research fields might have valuable concepts, insights, and theories to contribute to resistance studies, this study for practical reasons maintains a focus on the resistance literature of India with special focus on the despair, melancholy, dis-heartedness, despondency, oppression, plight, struggle, brutality and resistance movement of Kashmir.

Routledge defines resistance as "any action imbued with the intent that attempts to challenge change or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes and/or institutions... imply some form of contestation... cannot be separated from practices of domination. (Butler, 229-30)

Another definition of resistance according to Pile and Keith is taken from their studies of the *Geographies of Power* as

...implacable opposition to 'power'", they state that "'resistance' is the people fighting back in defense of freedom, democracy, and humanity." Here resistance becomes per definition something normatively good. Such a definition excludes not only fascist or terrorist resistance but also the (unintentional) oppressive effects or power dynamics of resistance activity, as e.g. the well-known stratification of resisters into (sometimes even formal) hierarchies. (Vinhagen, 04-05)

The novel *The Half Mother* by Shahnaz Bashir, a journalist, and professor by profession is the chronicle of a family that becomes a victim of military oppression and state-sponsored terrorism like thousands of families in Kashmir. In other words, the story of the family of half mother- Haleema is the microcosm of oppression and brutality in Kashmir and their resistance against this lawful or state terrorism. The novelist nostalgia's his readers with the dreadful memories that still haunt the people of Kashmir and still exists in the valley in other forms. It also portrays the most unfortunate period of the history of freedom struggle of Kashmir, when torture, custody, and detention meant death and disappearances in the valley. The protagonist of the novel is Haleema- a half mother, who exemplifies those unfortunate mothers of Kashmir who have lost their loved children and other loved ones also in this cunning conflict of actually politicians and bureaucrats of India and Pakistan. The novel revolves round the ugly and illegitimate military occupation of India in Kashmir and it questions Indian leadership and the world's largest democracy because of its implementation of harsh and draconian laws on the people. The paper deals with the unending pain which the unfortunate mother Haleema undergoes following the enforced disappearance of her son by the Military and her resistance against this brutality till her death.

Epitome of Motherly Pain

Kashmir is witnessing an intense pain and suffering from the last thirty years because of turmoil, uncertainty, confusion, chaos and conflict prevailing therein. This has left scars, wounds, and abrasions in the hearts of the victimized people of Kashmir. It is said that more than seven lack Indian armed force personals are deployed in Kashmir Valley, which makes it as the world's most militarized place. According to the rough estimate of people of Kashmir, some more than 1.25 lack of people are killed and more than 10 thousand are disappeared during the last three decades of turmoil. According to the report of Human Rights Watch, published by Greater Kashmir-a leading newspaper of J&K, Indian forces have "...assaulted civilians during search operations, tortured and summarily executed detainees in custody and murdered civilians in reprisal attacks." Shahnaz Bashir is a budding writer, assistant professor of media studies at the central university of Kashmir. He is the writer of the Memoir, an account of *A Crackdown in Natipora* and his debut novel *The Half Mother*. Mirza Waheed, author of the *Collaborator* said about the book, "...with delicately drawn characters, Shahnaz Bashir tells the heartbreaking the story of woman's battle for life, dignity, and justice" (Mirza).

"A devastating portrayal of a decadent society and the inevitably violent uprising against it... it is ferocious unsparing and brutally honest" (Anita Desai). *The Half Mother* is the tragedy which ridiculed Kashmir's political, bureaucratic system and military oppression. Kashmir is the history of struggle, oppression, displacement, killing, murder mystery, rape, etc. It was an independent state, having its own prime minister until 1953. The Pakistani people known as *Kabails* came from Pakistan to Kashmir for illegal occupation but Kashmiri authorities resisted and asked for India's help. India accepted the request and sent their Army for help but India never left and claims that it is India's crown and an

integral part also. All the people of Kashmir then want independence from those monstrous *Kabails* and now from the illegal occupation of India. The illegal occupation and oppressive nature of India gave rise to a conflict between India and Kashmir called *Jung-e-Azadi* (struggle for freedom) by the people of Kashmir. The Kashmiri young people crossed the border in order to get trained and brought guns for the struggle of independence against India, as they are brave Kashmiri youth having the ideology that it is better to die young like a lion than to live long like ducks.

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?

Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can the patter out their hasty orisons. (Owen, 01)

The novel is mostly set in Natipora area of Srinagar, it is the sad tale of the deprived mediocre family- which is a microcosm of repression, suppression, and barbarity at the hands of the Indian army. The novel is the example of motherly love and her resistance against armed brutality and her throughout the novel wants justice, she struggles and strives for her son, she knocks every door but no justice has prevailed to her. She was ruthless, uneasy, in plightful condition, waiting for help will come from any side but her condition was well-preserved only by the angel of death. Haleema is the tragic figure, who is not only the victim of Indian brutality like thousands of women in Kashmir but also the victim of her husband, her destiny.

She lost her mother at the age of eight and consequently had to leave the school to look after the household activities. She got married to the medical assistant; Haleema gives birth to a baby boy, an 'apple of her eye', and a dear one to her father Ghulam Rasool Joo (Abajan). The boy was only hoping for Haleema because her brutal and cunning husband left her and married another woman in the meantime. The boy was named Imran and Haleema would have thought that her son may provide her a healing touch and would be a solace to her but the case turns something different and Haleema becomes the woman of tragedies later. Imran like other boys of his time has grown up in an atmosphere when the valley was overwhelmed by horror and turmoil of the 90's. It was the period when the turmoil and insurgency were at its peak and crackdowns, torture, detention, killings, fake encounters, curfews were rampant. It was during this period that thousands of Kashmiri's were killed in one way or the other. Agha Shahid Ali mirrors it as:

"...Empty? Because so many fled, ran away,

and became refugees there, in the plains,

where they must now will a final dewfall

to turn the mountains to glass. They'll see

us through them-see us frantically bury

houses to save them from the fire that, like a wall,

caves in. The soldiers light it, hone the flames,

burn our world to sudden papier-mache..." (*A Country without a Post Office*, 26)

It was a wintery morning Imran and his grand-father (Ab Jaan) went outside their house to clear the snow from the footpath and were surprised to see the army men constructing a bunker just in front of the main gate of their house. The duo had a little argument with them and resisted this construction, which is both unlawful and dangerous. The argument was actually done by Ab Jaan and Imran was standing by the side of his grandfather. Army personals insulted Ab Jaan, pushed him backward, abused him and even warned him it could cost their lives. Thus Imran retaliates very angrily to them, which later became the only reason that Major Kushwaha starts to hate them and brings disaster to the whole family.

Imran furiously sprinted towards the trooper who had punched Ab Jaan, ramming into his legs and pummeling his thigh. ‘How dare you touch my Ab Jaan? How dare...I’ll kill you,’ Imran screamed and growled fiercely. (*The Half Mother*, 27)

One another day, militants attacked on army in the vicinity of Natipora and in the following day Major Kushwaha along with his team came in the area for search operation, but instead of searching they beaten the people, burned the shops, which compelled Ab Jaan to argue with the officer once again, “What is this? You beat everyone. There are civilians in this locality, yet you burn down our shops, you snatch away our living and now you are torturing us. Don’t you have any shame?” Ab Jaan argued bravely, yet trembling.” (*The Half Mother*, 48). This time the cruel major Kushwaha, who was not less cruel than General Dyer catches him by his collar, drags him out and fires bullets upon him ruthlessly, which leads to his death. Nobody in the world even Haleema could not accept or believe that this type or kind of calamity can fall on them. This brutal killing was a big setback and blow on her, after the death of her mother and her separation from her cunning husband.

The whole calamity on Haleema was not from God only, but it came from Major Kushwaha, his brutality traumatized the whole family. Imran stays awake for late hours at night because the nostalgia of his grandfather haunts him. Ab Jaan was the sole breadwinner in the family, he used to provide gifts to him, takes him away and used to narrate him stories of great people like scientists, educationists, etc. This made him almost lunatic, he used to stay in isolation and talks less.

Haleema and her son, Imran were now the only surviving in the family. They were always in the fear that any misfortune can occur on them as they have witnessed only misfortune throughout their lives. One night their fear became reality, a sudden noise wakes them up and trembles them. Haleema unbolted the door, saw the men in uniform in the usual enraged mood, they positioned outside and caught Imran. They started beating him in front of his mother and others and took him in the gypsy. She couldn’t believe that her only son is taken by the same cruel person who has killed her father, she started pleading and begging to Major Kushwaha for her sons’ release and crying that her son is her only purpose to live and his innocence, “...What is his crime? What has he done? You are mistaken! You know you are mistaken! Why do you this to me.” (*The Half Mother*, 56). But the cruel can never be a real human being. That unfortunate night, Imran was taken by the troopers forever and he was never released again, his whereabouts is still a mystery whether he is alive in any jail or dead.

After the disappearance of Imran, Haleema starts her mission of tracing her missing son. She goes from pillar to post and visited different jails and police stations, marshy lands and mortuaries. She also approaches politicians, bureaucrats, and journalists to get any clue about her son but of no avail and had to leave empty handed all the time. While searching for her son, she discovered that she is not the only mother but there is a number of mothers like her who had lost

their loved ones. Like Imran, there are thousands like him who were kidnapped, involuntarily disappeared and tortured in infamous and notorious detention centers like Papa 1 and Papa 2.

Years of struggle and untiring efforts to find her son bears no fruit to Haleema. A time reaches when she had to sell her land Property, jewellery, cattle as she was broken now and had no money left. The words of Haleema during interaction with local Imam about the land deal are distressing and heartbreaking:

I need your help. I need some money. If you could help me sell my orchard... I don't need that land now. Ab jaan would take care of it; prune the tress, sprays pesticide. After him...any disfigured fruit that grows rots untouched. Even my cattle are gone. (*The Half Mother*, 109).

Haleema sacrifices both her health and property to achieve her only goal that was Imran. Her affection towards her son forces her to leave no stone unturned for the sake of her missing son. After many years of the enforced disappearance of Imran, Haleema was shattered physically, mentally and economically. She acted like an insane and starts talking to the walls and it seems to her that the things around her are responding as well. Her health had given her an answer now and it was difficult for her to sleep and often forgets to take her medicine. She used to take out Imran's clothes to kiss and converse with them. Then, in a mournful voice, she crooned a painful Kashmiri throbbing song in a low voice:

Kyazi tscaai'I roodham maah-i-nam ke hilaal tai?

Doh goum pyaraan, chhi na tsalaan malaal tai?

O crescent moon, why do you hide from me?

Sulking as you are, why have you kept me? (*The Half Mother*, 70).

The separation from her dear son breaks the back of Haleema and after his disappearance, the aching and agonizing memory of Ab jaan's death had started to fade now and it seems to her that Ab jaan has been killed decades ago. She even loses the count of days and forgets her age as the memory of Imran has dejected her. Imran had taken a permanent place in the mind of Haleema and everything around seems burning to her after his disappearance:

What if Imran suddenly came from behind and covered my eyes with his hands? Haleema imagined. One evening, as she laid out the utensils to serve herself dinner, she ladled the rice onto two plates. Then suddenly, while serving the collard, she stopped and sat down on the wooden stool in the corner of the kitchen. She began to sob, followed by a low wail that reverberated in the empty house. (*The Half Mother*, 108).

Consolation from Shafiq, Rukhsana and help from time to time by Izhar may have given her little hope, but her joy would have no limits, had Imran returned to her. After his appointment with the so-called Chief Minister Dr. Aiyaash Mir, she had thought that approaching him would bear some fruit in tracing her son but the man mocks and plays with the grievances and her painful story by taking no pains and said:

I have gone through the same madness myself,' he said. 'My wife is in America. My son is in America. My daughters are here and there. My family is scattered. I am here. I keep no trace of my family. I am like you. Actually, we are all the same. We can't do anything. I can just pray for you. (*The Half Mother*, 151).

This gibberish, balderdash, and contemptible nonsense from the stooge clearly allude to all those politicians who have sold their soul to sit on the coffins of thousands of innocents for their own interests and political means.

Haleema keeps hoping to find her son which kills and resurrects her at the same time. After years of waiting and agony, she joins an assemblage of persons known as APDP (Association of parents of disappeared persons), whose relatives are disappeared because of military and police high-handedness. The association provides a real picture of Kashmir which is totally different from the landscape and the beauty for which it's admired. Every year on December 10, the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) pays tribute to thousands of disappeared persons of Jammu and Kashmir. The tribute is a reminder of the fact that struggle will continue until justice is delivered.

The dismal tale of Haleema reaches its climax when she is admitted in the hospital and dies with unfulfilled desire. The words which Haleema utters at the time of her death are certainly moving and make one cry: "Imran Saeba? Aakha (Imran. Have you come?)" (*The Half Mother*, 178). Helplessness and pain of Haleema will live and remain in the reader's mind for a long time. She symbolizes every mother of Kashmir whose loved ones are disappeared and do not know whether they are dead or alive. They still live with the hope that their *Lakhte jigar* (*Dear ones*) may return someday. The bond between mother and son is an unimaginable one and only the mother knows the pangs when she gets separated from a son.

The mother lost her son, everybody knows that the people who were detained by Indian Army and whose whereabouts were hidden from their family were either killed in custodial operations or in fake encounters, but how can a mother whose not only lonely son but even the lonely relative was taken from her arms and killed for no crime but being a Kashmiri. Nobody could stop her from her lunatic resistance and search, but only the angel of death could perform this impossible deed. The angel of death killed one Haleema at one time but he has to kill thousands of Haleemas and perhaps this will continue till the occupation ends.

CONCLUSIONS

Jiska law hai uska order. Made on order law and order. India Pakistan ne milkar khaila humse border . Ab na hume chode Hindustan, ab na hume chode Pakistan. Are koi humse be tou pocho, hum kya chahte? Azadi. (Haider movie).

In conclusion, it can be said that the novel presents a dismal picture of that place of the world where the army and the police have been given free license to kill innocent people at will. It is the place where no Indian military man has been tried in any civilian court after gross human rights violation. Besides, the novel ridicules the justice system that is impotent to provide justice to thousands of cases like Imran. The novel is relevant to Kashmir's current state of affairs, its struggle for freedom and self-determination. The novelist has highlighted the plightful condition of people of Kashmir, the monstrous military oppression, mass killing, torture, sexual harassment, struggle, political and bureaucratic corruption, etc. It is the depiction of twenty-five years history of Kashmir- struggle for freedom from the military captivity. Both India and Pakistan are playing with the sentiments of people. Pakistan is sympathetic towards Kashmir for its personal gain and India is playing a dirty politics in order to keep the land of Kashmir, not Kashmiri people. If India would have any sympathy for Kashmiri people, they would have never killed them or harassed them so mercilessly. India is using every key to keep Kashmir as a part of India; they are giving some fake sympathetic speeches and press conferences. They are also using tyrannical approach toward common masses in order to suppress them.

The women of Kashmir are in the tens of thousands of widows and half-widows; wives of killed and disappeared men; as well as mothers and grandmothers of missing children. Vulnerable, often impoverished, the sorrows, struggles, and humiliation of these women of Kashmir are a catalogue of charges against the occupation of Kashmir. (*Of Occupation and Resistance: Writings from Kashmir*)

This unlawfulness, draconian laws, harsh treatment, killing, murder, and displacement gives rise to a mass movement, against the government, army and bureaucracy of India, which is called terrorism by Indian government and *Jihad* by some orthodox religious people, but actually it is neither *Jihad* nor terrorism, it is resistance against all the brutalities, harms, killings, displacements and disappearances.

So according to Doer's *Lament* I pray, "That evil ended. So also may this!" (Routledge: History, 06)

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